

Ego and Spirit, the Head and Heart of Compassion

Ego y Espíritu, la Cabeza y el Corazón de la Compasión

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Abstract

This essay examines reasons why the ego has often been blamed for standing in the way of compassion and discusses spiritual practices that can help the ego participate more fully in the life of compassion. Attention is given to two illusions that predispose the ego to be resistant to compassion, the illusion of self-proximity and the illusion of self-sovereignty. The illusion of self-proximity leads the ego to overvalue itself in relation to others, and the illusion of self-sovereignty causes the ego to be resistant to the fully awakened presence of spirit, the (assumed but unspecified) source of compassionate feelings. In focusing on the illusions of self-proximity and self-sovereignty, the essay discusses two spiritual practices the purposes of which are to eliminate these illusions, the practice of loving kindness (which works to eliminate the illusion of self-proximity) and the practice of beckoning a higher power (which works to eliminate the illusion of self-sovereignty). The primary thesis of the essay is that it is only by eliminating the illusions of self-proximity and self-sovereignty that the ego is able to enter into full partnership with spirit in the life of compassion. This partnership is a two-in-one union of the ego and spirit in which the ego is the "head," the rational mind and disciplining will, and spirit the "heart," the outreaching love, of compassion.

Keywords: ego, compassion, spiritual development, meditation, prayer

Resumen

Este ensayo examina algunas razones por las que el ego ha sido a menudo culpado de interponerse en el camino de la compasión, y analiza las prácticas espirituales que pueden ayudar a que el ego participe más plenamente en la vida de la compasión. Se presta atención a dos ilusiones que predisponen al ego para ser resistente a la compasión: la ilusión de la auto-proximidad y la ilusión de la auto-soberanía. La ilusión de la auto-proximidad conduce el ego a sobrevalorarse a sí mismo en relación a los demás, y la ilusión de la auto-soberanía hace que el ego sea resistente a la presencia totalmente despierta del espíritu, la (supuesta, pero no especificada) fuente de los sentimientos de compasión. Al centrarse en las ilusiones de auto-proximidad y la auto-soberanía, el ensayo analiza dos prácticas espirituales cuyo objetivo es eliminar estas ilusiones, la práctica de la bondad amorosa (ejercida para eliminar la ilusión de auto-proximidad) y la práctica de convertirse en un poder superior (ejercida para eliminar la ilusión de la auto-soberanía). La tesis principal de este ensayo afirma que sólo mediante la eliminación de las ilusiones de auto-proximidad y la auto-soberanía el ego es capaz de entrar en plena colaboración con el espíritu en la vida de la compasión. Esta asociación es una unión de dos-en-uno del ego y el espíritu, en el que el ego es la "cabeza", la mente racional y la voluntad disciplinada, y el espíritu es el "corazón", el amor de contactos directos, de la compasión.

Palabras clave: ego, compasión, desarrollo espiritual, meditación, oración

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The ego has a bad reputation in writings on spirituality. It is often blamed for ignorance, selfishness, and sin. In this vein, it is often alleged that the ego is responsible for our failures to be as compassionate as we could be. This allegation is not without some truth, for it cannot be denied that the ego does often stand in the way of compassion. However, the truth of the allegation is only partial, for, I suggest, the ego need not stand in the way of compassion and in fact plays an essential role in the life of compassion. In this essay I argue that the ego and spirit play complementary—equally necessary, mutually completing—roles in the life of compassion, the ego being the head (mind and will) and spirit the heart (outreaching love) of compassion.

I begin by defining “ego,” “spirit,” and “compassion” so that we can be clear about the sense in which the ego and spirit play complementary roles in the life of compassion. The definitions are set forth in italics and are followed by brief comments.

The ego is the subject of consciousness and an agency that performs cognitive and volitional functions.

As the subject of consciousness, the ego is that in us that experiences what is presented to consciousness. It is the “experiencer,” the “I” that is each person’s innermost individual self. As an agency that performs cognitive and volitional functions, the ego is that in us that thinks (e.g., analyzes, infers, tests, deliberates) and that exercises will (e.g., decides, yields to or controls feelings and desires, takes action in the world). Being the subject of consciousness is what the ego most basically *is*; performing cognitive and volitional functions is what the ego most basically *does*.

Spirit is the energy that draws us together as conscious beings with a common life.

Whereas the ego is that in us that makes each of us a unique individual I or self, spirit is that in us that draws us together as conscious beings sharing a common life. Spirit is inherently outreaching and life-affirming. When spirit expresses itself through us, we are moved to reach beyond ego boundaries and enter into close relationship with others in promotion of life interests we share with others—all others. Spirit is thus the power of love.

Compassion is experiencing the feelings of others in a way that prompts action promoting life interests shared with others.

Compassion is experiencing the feelings of others *as if they were one’s own*. The emphasis is added because it is only when the feelings of others are experienced as if they were one’s own that one is motivated to act in behalf of others by promoting their interests or, more precisely, their *life* interests, the interests in which all of us share. Compassion is thus experiencing the feelings of others in an action-prompting, life-interest-promoting way. I believe that this general formulation holds no matter what the feelings of others might be. For example, in experiencing the suffering of others, compassion would prompt one to alleviate the suffering; in experiencing the kindness of others, compassion would prompt one to support the kindness; in experiencing the arrogance of others, compassion would prompt one to confront the arrogance; and in experiencing the hatred of others, compassion would prompt one to do whatever is necessary to bring an end to the hatred. As these examples indicate, compassion is not always “tender love”; it is frequently “tough love.” Tender love and tough love are two equally important expressions of compassion, the former promoting life interests shared with others in a direct way, the latter promoting life interests shared with others in an indirect way, by overcoming barriers that stand in the way of those interests.

There is nothing in these definitions of “ego,” “spirit,” and “compassion” that would indicate that the ego need stand in the way of compassion. In fact, taken together the definitions imply that there can be no compassion without an ego. The definitions have this implication, first, because there can be no experiencing of another’s feelings without an ego, an experiencer, to do the experiencing. Compassion can occur only when one experiencing subject or self is drawn to another by spirit and experiences what the other experiencing subject or self is feeling. The ego is thus a necessary condition of compassion.

A second reason why the definitions set forth imply that there can be no compassion without an ego is that compassion requires not only an ego to experience another’s feelings but also an ego to perform cognitive and volitional functions. Without an ego to exercise mind and will, loving feelings would be completely blind and impulsive, of benefit, if to anyone, only to the nearest possible recipient, however worthy or unworthy. There

must be an ego to understand which possible recipients of compassion are most pressingly in need of tender or tough love and what kinds of actions would do these recipients the greatest good. Additionally, there must be an ego to ensure that, by exercise of will, compassion is in fact channeled to the recipients most pressingly in need and is in fact expressed in actions that do the greatest good. There can be no compassion without an ego because compassion requires not only the heart of spirit but also the head, the mind and will, of the ego.

This point made—and it is the major point of the essay—the following obvious question arises: Why, if the ego is thus necessary for compassion, does it have such a bad reputation in writings on spirituality? I propose two answers. The first is that the ego experiences not only compassionate feelings prompting it to contribute to the welfare of others but also self-regarding impulses prompting it to pursue its own welfare. Compassionate feelings reflect the instinct of species (or group) preservation; self-regarding impulses reflect the instinct of self-preservation. These instincts need not be in conflict. In principle it is possible to promote the welfare of others without neglecting one's own welfare and to promote one's own welfare without neglecting the welfare of others. Species preservation need not be self-sacrificial, and self-preservation need not be selfish. However, the fact is that the two instincts in question *are* frequently in conflict, for in most people the instinct of self-preservation is much stronger than and too often overrides the instinct of species preservation. The examples of parents who sacrifice themselves to save their children or of soldiers who sacrifice themselves to save their fellow soldiers are exceptions that prove the rule. Regrettably but understandably, most people most of the time are so strongly interested in their own welfare that they are neglectful of the welfare of others.

This weakness of the species-preserving instinct when compared to the self-preserving instinct is to a large extent due to an illusion of self-importance arising from the proximity of one's own self. Just as the telephone pole next to which one is standing seems larger than all the others, so one's own self, to which one is closer than close, seems more important than all other selves. We—unlike very young children—are able to take the perspective of other people, especially if we are disposed to try. However, when we do take the perspective of others and begin to see what they see and feel what they feel, we do so from afar and, owing to the illusion of self-importance, tend to feel their feelings less strongly than we feel our

own and, therefore, to view their needs as less important than our own. Later I offer some thoughts about how the illusion of self-importance might be overcome. Here it suffices to suggest that this illusion plays a major role in our tendency to feel self-regarding impulses much more strongly than we do other-regarding or compassionate feelings.

The second answer to the question about the ego's bad reputation is that ordinarily—that is, before spiritual awakening—the ego is to a significant extent out of touch with spirit. Ordinarily, the ego is unaware of spirit as a power at work within the soul, let alone as a power in relation to which the ego is an inferior power. Although the ego's compassionate feelings are expressions of spirit, the ego does not recognize them as such. The ego thus ordinarily experiences spirit without awareness that it is in fact spirit that it experiences. If the ego does have any of awareness of spirit, it ordinarily does so only vaguely, as an unknown attractor for which it might long or to which it might pray. Thus out of touch with spirit, the ego knows no power within the soul greater than itself; and for this reason it suffers from the illusion of being the sovereign power of the soul.

This illusion of self-sovereignty predisposes the ego to be threatened by spirit should spirit ever manifest itself within the soul with sufficient power for the ego to realize that spirit, not it, is in fact the sovereign power of the soul. The ego, accustomed to the presumption of sovereignty, is understandably resistant to any power that would disabuse it of this presumption. Now because spirit is the source of compassion, any resistance on the part of the ego to spirit must be counted as resistance to compassion, at least to compassion in the fullness of spirit's expression. The ego thus stands in the way of spirit and, therefore, compassion so long as it is either (1) out of touch with spirit sufficiently not yet to realize that spirit is the source of compassion and the sovereign power of the soul or (2) in touch with spirit sufficiently to be aware of these facts about spirit but nonetheless still sufficiently attached to its own presumption of sovereignty to be resistant to spirit's superior power.

Bringing together our two answers to the question about the ego's bad reputation, we can say that the ego has this reputation in large part because, owing to the illusion of self-importance, it tends to give self-regarding impulses priority over other-regarding feelings and because, owing to the illusion of self-sovereignty, it tends to be at odds with spirit in the fullness of spirit's expression. Under the spell of these illusions, the ego is subject to ignorance (both illusions), selfishness (the illusion of self-importance), and sin (the illusion of

self-sovereignty). The ego must for this reason dispel these illusions if it is to overcome its bad reputation. Unfortunately, the illusions of self-importance and self-sovereignty are deep-seated and not easily dispelled. Fortunately, though, there are spiritual practices that work against these illusions and in time can dispel them. Two such practices in particular are especially effective because they directly target the illusions in question. The first is the practice of loving kindness, which targets the illusion of self-importance; the second is the practice of beckoning a higher power, which targets the illusion of self-sovereignty.

The practice of loving kindness

In this practice the ego seeks to become more compassionate by *trying to be* more compassionate. It does so by practicing charity, generosity, good will, or, to adopt the Buddhists' way of referring to it, loving kindness (Pali: *mettā*). Loving kindness can be practiced both in meditation and in action. In meditating on loving kindness, the ego focuses on others in an attempt to elicit feelings of loving kindness for them. It is easy to elicit such feelings in meditating on people who are near and dear. The challenge is to widen the range of people for whom feelings of loving kindness come forth, so that in the end no one is left out. Compassion grows not only when compassionate feelings occur more often and grow stronger but also and perhaps especially when the range of compassion widens.

There are many ways to meditate on loving kindness. One way that is both powerful and simple is to employ the imagination in an effort to experience what it would be like to be other people, people of all sorts. In this meditation the ego uses the imagination to project itself into other people's lives, seeking both to see and to feel as they do. Practicing this meditation requires the suspension of negative judgment. Negative judgment creates distance, and in the meditation we are describing—let us call it “vicarious imagining”—the ego uses the imagination to get so close to others that in imagination it *becomes* others, even others whom the ego would ordinarily find offensive or reprehensible. In practicing vicarious imagining the ego is attempting to become others so that, in seeing what they see and feeling as they feel, it can begin caring for them as it cares for itself.

To recall, compassion involves not only tender but also tough love. This point bears repeating here because the instruction to suspend negative judgment in practicing vicarious imagining

does not imply that negative judgment is in itself inappropriate. In particular, it does not imply that all people are inherently good and deserving of tender love. Again, suspension of negative judgment is simply an expedient for eliciting compassionate feelings for the widest possible range of people. The purpose of suspending negative judgment is to be able to feel compassion even for people who might merit negative judgment, people for whom compassion would properly be tough rather than tender love, love of intervention or discipline rather than of affirmation or service.

Practicing loving kindness in action, as in meditation, is an attempt to elicit the very feelings that are being practiced. The ego seeks to “do good unto others” not because that is what the ego should do or because the ego will accrue merit for doing so but rather because doing good unto others is what the ego wants—or, rather, is *trying* to want—to do. The point of practicing loving kindness in action is to learn to experience satisfaction in acting in behalf of others, whether by working to reduce their suffering, to increase their happiness, or, with tough love, to help them free themselves from harmful feelings and behaviors. For most people such attempts to act with loving kindness are more a matter of effort than satisfaction in early stages of practice. However, as practice deepens, more and stronger compassionate feelings arise and the balance gradually swings in the opposite direction.

Practicing loving kindness, whether in meditation or in action or both, is one of the principal endeavors of the world's religions. Mention has already been made of Buddhism, for which the *Karaniya Metta Sutta*, the Buddha's discourse on loving kindness, is the foundational text encouraging the practice. In Buddhism loving kindness is one of two primary forms of meditation, the other being the practice of mindfulness leading to insight. These two forms of meditation are said to complement each other and to cultivate a balanced enlightenment rich in both love and wisdom. In Hinduism loving kindness is the focus of one of the major forms of yoga, bhakti yoga, which puts love into practice in meditation, ritual, and action. Perhaps the most influential spiritual classic of Hinduism, the *Bhagavad Gita*, extols bhakti yoga as the most direct and powerful route to liberation. In turn, in Christianity loving kindness is practiced as the second of the two greatest commandments of the religion. After enjoining his followers to love God, Jesus enjoined them to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:35–40, Mark 12:28–34). According to Christianity, these two forms of loving practice eclipse in importance

anything else one might do in seeking to lead a spiritual life.

Practicing loving kindness leads to growth in compassion because the attempt to love others is self-potentiating, which is to say, it produces rather than exhausts love. The more one tries to love others the more love one has for others. Trying to love others taps into hidden resources of love, transforming what hitherto was potential loving energy into actual loving feelings. Practicing loving kindness thus fills rather than empties the well of love. It produces increasingly strong pulsations of energy that arise from the depths of the soul and flow outward to others through the agency of the ego, as loving feelings that draw the ego to others. The ego practicing loving kindness may be surprised to discover that such resources of love exist within the soul.

The ego, in thus growing in compassion for others, at the same time grows in understanding of the true measure of its own importance. The increasingly strong feelings of love for others that the ego experiences lead the ego to understand—not only abstractly but also experientially—that it is no more important than others. These feelings awaken the ego to the fact that it shares a common life with others, a life that is equally valuable in all who participate in it. The ego's proximity to itself is thus put in proper perspective, as a proximity of psychological distance only, not of value or importance. In this way the practice of loving kindness eventually dispels the illusion of self-importance.

It is worth noting that the practice of loving kindness, although not aimed directly at the illusion of self-sovereignty, can in time dispel this illusion as well. It can lead to this result because the ego, in practicing loving kindness, may eventually arrive at the insight that the increasingly strong feelings of love that upwell from depths within the soul arise from a source lying beyond the ego itself. The ego may eventually come to see that these feelings, rather than being generated by itself, as its own feelings of love for others, are instead expressions of a previously invisible power that is now awakening within the soul. The dawning of this insight, if and when it occurs, brings the ego to understand that it is neither alone nor supreme within the soul, that it shares the soul with another, superior power. The practice of loving kindness can thus disabuse the ego of its presumption of being the sovereign power of the soul. This point made, let us now turn to the practice of beckoning a higher power, which takes direct aim at the illusion of self-sovereignty.

The practice of beckoning a higher power

The practice of beckoning a higher power has two major stages: (1) the stage of beckoning proper, which occurs before the higher power has manifested itself; and (2) the stage of adapting to the higher power, which occurs after the higher power has manifested itself. In the first stage the ego prayerfully invites or meditatively awaits the manifestation of a higher power, something that is greater than the ego and that, the ego believes, will ground, enlighten, redeem, or complete it. In the second stage the ego, having begun discernibly to experience the higher power it had beckoned, seeks to conform itself to this power to avoid, as the lesser power, being affected harshly by it.

The first stage of practice can be undertaken in many ways. Most types of prayer and meditation are exercises that beckon a higher power, which might be understood personally or impersonally, as a daemon, God, the holy, Brahman, sacred emptiness, undifferentiated consciousness, and so forth. Such exercises can take the form of devotional outreach to a personal god (e.g., most forms of religious prayer) or of alert attention awaiting the manifestation of a higher plane of consciousness or reality (e.g., many Hindu and Buddhist meditations leading to breakthrough absorptions or insights) or of silent receptivity poised for the manifestation of a higher spiritual being (e.g., Roman Catholic prayer of quiet). Whatever specific form it takes, the first stage of the practice of beckoning a higher power has two purposes. It has the primary purpose of eliciting contact with the higher power and the allied purpose of preparing for such contact by adopting a posture of receptivity, either a posture of reverent submission (when beckoning a personal god or higher spiritual being) or a posture of non-resistant openness (when beckoning a higher plane of consciousness or reality).

The second stage of the practice of beckoning a higher power begins once beckoning proper has led to discernible contact with the power. Substituting "spirit"—understood in a sense sufficiently wide to include both personal and impersonal interpretations—for "higher power," we can say that the ego now meets spirit face to face. This meeting with spirit can be more or less gradual or sudden, more or less gentle or harsh. For present purposes, it will be helpful to assume a sudden and harsh manifestation, not because such a manifestation is the rule—it may be a rare exception—but rather because such a manifestation throws into relief two substages through which the second stage of the practice of beckoning a higher power

can pass. The substages are these: (1) the substage of spirit's tough love of the ego, which removes the ego's resistance to spirit and, therefore, to compassion; and (2) the substage of spirit's tender love of the ego, which helps the ego grow in spirit and, therefore, in compassion. These two substages lead to the culminating goal of ego-spirit union, which fully realizes the life of compassion.

The substage of spirit's tough love of the ego is so described because the ego, in meeting spirit face to face, immediately understands not only that it is much more out of conformity with spirit than it had assumed but also that it needs spirit's disciplining help, spirit's tough love, if it is to achieve conformity. No matter how hard the ego might have worked to establish a posture of receptivity to spirit in advance of meeting spirit face to face, it finds, once it has experienced spirit directly, that it is deeply resistant to spirit's superior power. This resistance constitutes a challenge to spirit; and the ego, as the lesser of the two powers, must lose the challenge, again and again. Spirit in this way disciplines the ego, helping it overcome its resistance.

Specifically, spirit disciplines the ego to help it overcome its continuing tendency to revert to its previous presumption of sovereignty and to help it eliminate countless defenses and habits that oppose spirit because they were developed on the basis of that presumption. When the ego reverts to the presumption of sovereignty, spirit, in opposite and more powerful fashion, asserts sovereignty over the ego, overpowering it and thus forcing it to recognize its lesser status. When the ego's defenses try to keep spirit at bay, spirit breaks through the defenses, wounding the ego and causing it anxiety. When the ego's habits constrain spirit, spirit disables the habits by arresting or derailing them, thus undermining many of the ego's developed response routines. In these and other ways, spirit humbles and disciplines the ego with tough love. In theistic terms, spirit might here be said to be a wrathful god who punishes the ego for its sins. In more broadly spiritual terms, spirit might here be said to be a frightening spiritual force that purges the ego of impediments to spiritual life. In our terms, these formulations are simply ways of saying that spirit here assists the ego in its struggle to conform to spirit by helping the ego eliminate resistances to spirit that the ego has difficulty eliminating on its own.

The substage of spirit's tender love of the ego is so described because the ego, having been overpowered, wounded, and disabled by spirit's tough love, now begins to be empowered, healed, and re-enabled by spirit's tender love. The ego,

with the help of spirit, has at this point made considerable progress in conforming to spirit. Consequently, spirit at this point undergoes a fundamental change in how it affects and is experienced by the ego. It now begins to affect the ego in ways that are decreasingly painful and increasingly pleasurable, in ways that are seemingly less adversarial or detrimental and evidently more caring or beneficial. In theistic terms, spirit might here be said to change in appearance from being a wrathful to being a merciful god, a god who comforts and inspires the ego. In more broadly spiritual terms, spirit might here be said to change in appearance from being a purgative to being a regenerative power, a power that strengthens and enlightens the ego. In our terms these formulations are simply ways of saying that spirit, having used tough love to help the ego overcome its resistance to spirit, now uses tender love to help the ego grow in spirit.

As the ego thus receives the support of spirit's tender love, it grows closer to spirit, becomes more like spirit, and is increasingly integrated with spirit. The ego in this way increasingly becomes *spirit's* ego, spirit's mind and will. Correspondingly, the love of spirit increasingly becomes the *ego's* love in the sense of being a gift that spirit gives to the ego so that the ego, having grown stronger and wiser in spirit, can share this gift with the world. As the ego and spirit thus grow closer, each taking on the features and strengths of the other, the substage of spirit's tender love of the ego eventually comes to an end and the culminating goal of ego-spirit union is achieved.

This goal is achieved once the ego is in full conformity and is fully integrated with spirit, once the ego and spirit are seamlessly joined as a two-in-one. In reaching this goal, the ego fully accepts spirit not only as the sovereign power of the soul but also as its own higher Self; correspondingly, spirit fully adopts the ego as its own ego. As spirit and the ego are thus united, what was spirit's tough and then tender love of the ego becomes the ego's tough and tender love of others. Compassion ceases being a gift of spirit to the ego and in an important sense becomes the ego's own compassion. Compassion is not here the ego's *rather* than spirit's compassion. The ego does not arrogate spirit's love, taking credit for it as if it derived from the ego itself, which earlier, before discovering that spirit is the source of love, it had done. The ego knows that the compassion it feels for others is "through" it rather than "from" it. It knows that compassion is from spirit and now belongs to it also only because it is now integrated with spirit as spirit's mind and will.

Let us retrace some of the steps that lead to ego-spirit union and, therefore, to the fully realized life of compassion. Initially, compassion consists of intermittent loving feelings that may or may not be acted upon by the ego. The ego assumes that these feelings are entirely its own. It has no idea at this point that compassion originates in spirit. Once the ego begins practicing loving kindness in an effort to become more compassionate, it begins to prime the pump of love and in this way eventually begins to experience stronger compassionate feelings. However, it still assumes that these feelings are entirely its own. Indeed, because the ego now experiences stronger compassionate feelings, it may consider itself to be an especially compassionate being. Such thinking is understandable, but it is symptomatic of the ego's ignorance of spirit and corresponding arrogation of spirit's love.

As compassionate feelings continue to grow in strength, the ego's assumptions about both its status and the source of compassion eventually undergo fundamental change. What the ego had initially assumed was a growth in the strength of its own compassionate feelings it eventually comes to see is the manifestation of a higher power within the soul, a power that is both superior to the ego and the true source of its compassionate feelings. Meeting this power face to face, the ego is disabused of both its presumption of sovereignty and its presumption of being the source of compassionate feelings. Concomitantly, it begins to understand both that spirit is the sovereign power of the soul and that spirit is the source of compassionate feelings. Furthermore, in coming to these understandings the ego comes to understand as well that spirit's love is not only a tender love of others but also a tough love, a tough love that is now aimed primarily at the ego itself in order to help it overcome its resistance to spirit.

As resistance to spirit gives way increasingly to conformity to spirit, the ego's assumptions about both its status and the source of compassion once again undergo fundamental change. Having at this point ceased being the target of spirit's tough love, the ego ceases perceiving itself as a recalcitrant subject being humbled and disciplined by spirit; and having become the beneficiary of spirit's tender love, the ego begins perceiving itself as a devoted subject being uplifted and nurtured by spirit. Concomitantly, the ego ceases perceiving compassion as only spirit's compassion and begins perceiving it as primarily spirit's but also as secondarily its own compassion, as compassion that, although originating in spirit, is now being given to the ego as a gift so that the ego can share this gift with the world.

Finally, once the ego is fully integrated with spirit as a true two-in-one, its assumptions about both its status and the source of compassion undergo one last fundamental change. Now fully integrated with spirit, the ego's perception of itself changes from that of a devoted subject being uplifted and nurtured by spirit to that of a subject that is no longer to any extent other than spirit. In corresponding fashion, the ego ceases experiencing compassion as spirit's tough or tender love of it, the ego, and begins to experience compassion as spirit *and* its tough or tender love of others. Compassion is thus no longer experienced as a gift of spirit to the ego and is now experienced as a compassion that, arising from spirit, belongs to both spirit and the ego. What, from the point of view of the ego, had originally been exclusively its own compassion and then exclusively spirit's compassion and then primarily spirit's but also secondarily (as a gift) its own compassion, thus becomes, as the culminating goal of ego-spirit union is achieved, fully both spirit and the ego's compassion.

In such ego-spirit union spirit is the heart of compassion, the ego the mind and will. Spirit provides love as the outreaching, attractive-attracting energy of compassion. The ego provides realistic understanding of how and to whom love should be distributed and the will to distribute love according to this understanding. Without spirit, compassion is cold, little more than a nagging of conscience to act in behalf of others. Without mind and will, compassion is blind and impulsive, a feeling without reality testing or regulation. All true compassion thus requires both spirit and the ego, and compassion in its fullness requires both fully awakened spirit and a fully developed ego acting as a true two-in-one. It requires that each of these complement the other in such a way that spirit's love flows in the fullness of spirit's power and the ego's mind and will facilitate the expression of this love with mature intelligence and strong, steadfast discipline.

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